The Antideutsch

An obituary

Jan-Georg Gerber

This article was originally published in Bahamas.[1] *It is based on the afterword to Jan-Georg Gerber's* Das letzte Gefecht: Die Linke im Kalten Krieg,[2] *as well as a talk he gave in January 2024 at the invitation of the Frankfurt Pro-Zionist Left. It has been translated into English by Platypus Affiliated Society member Tamas Vilaghy.*

THE ANTIDEUTSCH HAVE been pronounced dead many times already. Sometimes this was the expression of a wish, at other times a warning of a looming collapse meant to stave off further decline. What few could have denied already, given a lack of protest against the West's retreat from Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine, and the self-mutilation deployed via social media during the Corona crisis, nevertheless became clear after the October 7, 2023 Palestinian terror attack against Israel: the movement that never wanted to be a movement no longer existed. Hence why only scorned civil society organizations and other NGOs organized demonstrations and solidarity rallies for Israel after October 7 and not, as had become customary in the 00s, Antideutsch groups. The few exceptions only proved the rule.

The Antideutsch commentaries and explanations of the worst antisemitic crime since the Holocaust proved equally weak. Analyses which remain convincing to this day appeared just three days after September 11, 2001,[3] and yet, although 10/7 is in no way less important in its meaning than 9/11, almost three weeks passed by without a peep before the first presentable explication of the largest antisemitic massacre since 1945 was published.[4] Even the Berlin Left-wing weekly *Jungle World*,[5] which was long derided by the Antideutch with the label "Antideutsch light," acted more quickly.

Clearly, all this doesn't stem from the failure of individuals. Although we've come to love tracing back failure and backlash to the unpreparedness, betrayal, or personal depravity of current or former comrades, the hesitation after 10/7 had very little to do with these. It was much more reminiscent of Wolfgang Pohrt's description of the crack up of the German student movement in the 60s. He once wrote that during the highest phase of the protest movement, it took a few nights to read and understand books which would otherwise have taken months, if not years, to comprehend.[6] The same is true for the analyses. If the participants are to be believed, the treatment of topics such as the war in Vietnam, the Emergency Laws of 1968,[7] or post-fascism could be produced in a couple of days, sometimes in mere hours. The belief that one is feeling the winds of history behind one's back (or, if one prefers Walter Benjamin's critical view of progress, that one's hand is resting on the emergency break of the historical process)[8] produces astonishing psychodynamic consequences. Once this *kairos*[9] — the old name for it — passes by, greater success eludes us, or the winds of history turn out to be a tempest in a teapot, and then comes dejection. The capacity for mobilization as well as individual enthusiasm inevitably subside, and the level of intellectual activity most often declines.

Freedom, equality, safety

It's been a long time now since every major German city had its own Antideutsch group. At just one Israel-solidarity networking event for Eastern German Antifa groupings in 2005, summoned to life under the bungled name of "Zahal Ost,"[10] more than a dozen groups were represented. There were even more that couldn't participate due to time constraints. The names of these and other initiatives, alliances, and coalitions have been all but forgotten in the meantime. They were often French or English names with a pensive or well-read air, often martial-sounding and almost all unintentionally goofy: "Sur l'eau,"[11] "Liberté toujours,"[12] "T-34,"[13] "Gruppe Morgenthau,"[14] "No Tears for Krauts," "Antideutsche Aktion Berlin," "Association Pomme de Terre."[15]

To paraphrase Brecht, many of them were concerned with simple things that are difficult to do: they strove for a synthesis, based on the Frankfurt brand of critical theory, of the three original guiding principles of the French Revolution — freedom, equality, security —, of utopian and social contract-based paths to modernity, or more broadly, materialism and idealism. One of the most important starting points was Max Horkheimer's conviction that modern society could only be understood on the basis of antisemitism.[16]

Thus they (to avoid saying "we") broke with many Left-wing assumptions, such as with the false collectivism and the contempt for the individual shared by large parts of the Left, and broke with the hostility to Israel and with anti-Americanism as well. The name "Antideutsch" was borrowed from an article by Jürgen Elsässer,[17] who has long since wandered from the far Left towards *völkisch* socialism. Sometimes one called oneself Antideutsch, sometimes the term was bestowed upon one. Since it was never the most wrong-headed thinkers who were described as Antideutsch in the past, resistance to the term was rare: Heinrich Heine, Kurt Tucholsky, Thomas Mann, and Theodor W. Adorno seemed like good company to be in.

The regroupment of the Left

As generally understood, the Antideutsch emerged from the Left-wing critical discussions which took place after the fall of the Eastern Bloc in 1989–90, the crisis of anti-imperialism, and the implosion of other Leftist certainties at the time.[18] The immediate focus in the early 90s, as expressed by *Bahamas*, still published in Hamburg at the time (later in Berlin), was the new formation of a "non-reformist, radical, anticapitalist, communist Left."[19] Another Antideutsch newspaper offered the image of a hearse traveling through the towns during a plague, "loading up everything it could snatch from the dead and decomposing bodies[:] this or something like it is how we see our situation, we're just not sure what we'll come away with."[20]

It was soon obvious that it wouldn't be much. A large-scale boycott campaign against the first unified German parliamentary elections in 1990 failed spectacularly. The same thing happened with a campaign around *Tag der Befreiung*, the day of the liberation from National Socialism, on May 8, 1995.[21] That's why, by the second half of the 90s, the Antideutsch were overwhelmingly composed of small ideology-critique newspapers and theory circles. Even if some insisted that the ivory tower had "embrasures," those involved knew very well that this wasn't about political mobilization as much as preparing for hibernation. The errors and mistakes of the Left had to be worked through.

Cover of Das Konzept Antifa *(1998)*

The crisis of Antifa

This started to change in 2000 with the Al-Aqsa Intifada,[22] but above all after 9/11. To recall: over 20,000 terror attacks took place in Israel between 2000 and 2005, in which over 1,000 Israelis were killed. More than 7,000 were wounded. Almost 3,000 people were murdered and 6,000 wounded in a single day in the suicide attack in New York on September 11, 2001.

It was in this context that the ivory tower was abandoned; the loose affiliation of small "Antideutsch" or "ideology-critique" circles, groups, and individuals became a political movement; here began the high phase of the Antideutsch. Outrage over the German ambivalence to terror against Israel and the U.S. played not an insignificant part in this development. Protest against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq produced the largest anti-American marches in the history of the Bundesrepublik, and sympathetic appraisals of the suicide attacks in Israel and the attack on the World Trade Center crossed party lines. At the same time there developed a large united front against Israel and the United States, composed of the radical Left, neo-Nazis, social democrats, and Hamas supporters. Talk about a "German Way" [*Deutscher Weg*] became popular again. This helped the already battered Social Democratic Party of Germany[23] (SPD) to its second successive federal electoral victory in 2002.

This ahistorical transfiguration of peace was supposed by the Antideutsch side to be questioned through organized events, demonstrations, and campaigns. The distancing from the West was criticized. Max Horkheimer was a forerunner here as well. He, along with Adorno, formulated a categorical imperative in the 60s: "It is correct, and required of every thinker, to measure the so-called free world against its own ideals, to stay critical in regards to it, and nevertheless to stand by its ideas and defend it against fascism, whether of Hitlerian, Stalinian, or of any other variety."[24] This so-called free world, despite its "disastrous potential, despite its internal and external injustice," forms "an island in space and time whose loss in the ocean of tyranny would also be the loss of culture, to which critical theory belongs."[25] All the major German newspapers were soon writing about this noteworthy Left which oriented itself to these words and raised the American and Israeli flags at its demonstrations, attacking not only Left traditionalism but also the German mainstream. Even the *New York Times* and *Haaretz* reported on it.

Outrage was nevertheless not the only reason for the transformation of loosely related circles and journals into a movement; it was probably not even the most important. The rise of the Antideutsch coincided with the decline of another political current; we're speaking here of the antifascist movement (Antifa), which was the largest gathering of the extra-parliamentary Left in the 90s.

The Antifa movement entered into crisis in the summer of 2000, shortly before the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. After an arson attack on a synagogue in Düsseldorf, chancellor Gerhard Schröder called for what he named a "Revolt of the Decent." He urged his countrymen to no longer ignore the activities of neo-Nazis, as had become standard in the 90s — fighting

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About the Platypus Affiliated Society

The Platypus Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the "Old" (1920s–30s), "New" (1960s–70s) and post-political (1980s–90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.

The *Platypus Review* is funded by:

Phedias Christodoulides
Dalhousie Student Union
Loyola University of Chicago
The New School
New York University
Northwestern University
The Platypus Affiliated Society
School of the Art Institute of Chicago Student Government
The University of Chicago Student Government
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Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to editor.platypusreview@gmail.com. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes Leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of Leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

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The Second International in France

Millerand and the crisis of Marxism

Jack Wagner

On September 12, 2024, Platypus Affiliated Society member Jack Wagner gave a teach-in at Georgetown University on the Second International in France. A revised version of the teach-in follows.[1]

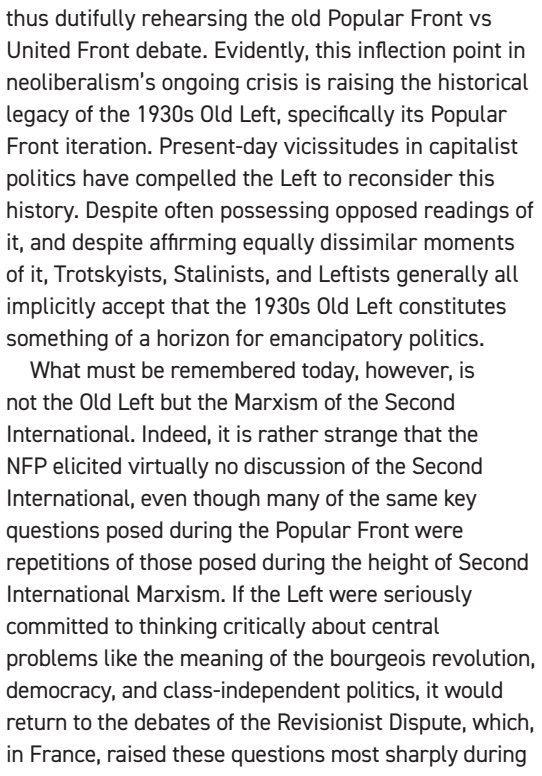
> "Millerandism in France—the biggest experiment in applying revisionist political tactics on a wide, a really national scale—has provided a practical appraisal of revisionism that will never be forgotten by the proletariat all over the world."
> — V.I. Lenin, "Marxism and Revisionism" (1908)[2]

THE TRIUMPH OF the Right-wing Rassemblement National[3] (RN) in the recent 2024 EU elections and Emmanuel Macron's subsequent call for snap elections prompted the formation of a coalition of center-and-far-Left parties that vowed to save French democracy from the imminent threat of fascism. This coalition, calling itself a Nouveau Front Populaire[4] (NFP), was initially celebrated as a resounding success for its strong electoral performance, thanks to which it gained a plurality of seats in the National Assembly, and its revitalization of the French Left in the wake of NUPES's crackup in 2022.[5] However, the initial wave of triumphalism quickly gave way to outrage and disillusionment after Macron refused to appoint as prime minister the NFP's preferred candidate, Lucie Castets, instead picking Michel Barnier of the center-Right party, Les Republicans.[6] Predictably, Jean-Luc Melenchon, leader of La France Insoumise,[7] claimed that "the election was stolen from the French people,"[8] while Socialist Party[9] leader Oliver Faure characterized Macron's decision as a "democratic denial."[10] Ironically, Barnier's ability to govern now rests in the hands of RN, who have vowed to support his prime ministership so long as he accedes to their policy demands.

The NFP explicitly recalls the antifascism of the 1930s Popular Front. The former's electoral success provoked Leftists internationally to openly embrace the Popular Front as a model for emancipatory politics in the present. For example, in a *Jacobin* article written shortly after the elections, contributing editor Chris Maisano praised the NFP's appropriation of the original Popular Front, arguing that "the NFP won because it successfully activated the mythic power of the original Popular Front's antifascist, Republican legacy."[11]

To be sure, there are those on the French Left who were not so sanguine about the NFP or its historical predecessor. In June 2024, the Ligue Trotskyiste de France proposed a "workers' united front" between various Trotskyist groups in opposition to the NFP, thus dutifully rehearsing the old Popular Front vs United Front debate. Evidently, this inflection point in neoliberalism's ongoing crisis is raising the historical legacy of the 1930s Old Left, specifically its Popular Front iteration. Present-day vicissitudes in capitalist politics have compelled the Left to reconsider this history. Despite often possessing opposed readings of it, and despite affirming equally dissimilar moments of it, Trotskyists, Stalinists, and Leftists generally all implicitly accept that the 1930s Old Left constitutes something of a horizon for emancipatory politics.

What must be remembered today, however, is not the Old Left but the Marxism of the Second International. Indeed, it is rather strange that the NFP elicited virtually no discussion of the Second International, even though many of the same key questions posed during the Popular Front were repetitions of those posed during the height of Second International Marxism. If the Left were seriously committed to thinking critically about central problems like the meaning of the bourgeois revolution, democracy, and class-independent politics, it would return to the debates of the Revisionist Dispute, which, in France, raised these questions most sharply during what has come to be known as the Millerand Affair.



Bassano, portrait of Alexandre Millerand (1920)

The Dreyfus Affair and the Revisionist Dispute

The Millerand Affair was a product of the Dreyfus Affair and the Revisionist Dispute. The former rocked the Third Republic to its core, as French politics practically split into two over the false conviction of Jewish artillery officer Alfred Dreyfus. The Dreyfusard camp, made up of liberals, republicans, and socialists, among others, was alarmed by the antisemitism of the anti-Dreyfusards, composed of antisemites, various Right-wing groups, military leaders, and much of the high-ranking clergy. In 1898, a Dreyfusard coalition came to power, promising to save the Republic from the antidemocratic and antisemitic threats posed by the anti-Dreyfusards. The alliance led by Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau was composed of centrists, republicans, liberals, and, controversially, a prominent socialist named Alexandre Millerand.

Millerand was part of the caucus of parliamentary socialists who weren't aligned with any of the numerous socialist tendencies and parties in France. In the years leading up to 1898, Millerand was increasingly considered an important leader in the evermore confident and increasingly unified French socialist movement.[12] Two years prior, he had given a rousing address to leading French socialists preaching the necessity of socialist unity, which all in attendance received with warm applause. When offered the ministry by Waldeck-Rousseau, Millerand didn't consult with the other caucus members before accepting, presumably because he expected little backlash. When that backlash did arrive, Millerand, perhaps plausibly, defended his decision on socialist grounds; indeed, the ensuing controversy was quite bewildering for Millerand. Socialists are republicans, aren't they? They ought to support democracy against the forces of reaction, right?[13]

Millerand's fateful decision to enter into a bourgeois government threw both the French socialist movement and international Marxism into crisis. The Millerand Affair, as it was called, was a critical moment of Marxism's great identity crisis. The Revisionist Dispute or Controversy, as it came to be known, arose simultaneously in the great Marxist parties of the Second International, most famously in the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) around the 1899 publication of Eduard Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism*. The Millerand Affair, although less well-known than the controversy in Germany, was nevertheless a particularly acute expression of the Revisionist Dispute that raised a set of altogether unique theoretical and practical questions for Second International Marxism. What was seemingly a mere dispute over tactics, namely whether socialists should join bourgeois governments, instantaneously became one of the opening salvos of the civil war in Marxism. Rosa Luxemburg perceptively characterized the existential threat that the Revisionist Dispute represented for the international socialist movement as such: "In the controversy with Bernstein and his followers, everybody in the Party ought to understand clearly it is not a question of this or that method of struggle, or the use of this or that set of tactics, but of the very existence of the Social-Democratic movement."[14]

Perhaps the most remarkable fact about the Revisionist Dispute is that revisionism, this tendency that threatened "the very existence of the Social-Democratic movement," appeared at the *height* of Second International Marxism's development in Europe. For the orthodox Marxists, this expressed the dialectical character of the Revisionist Dispute, whereby the specter of Marxism's regression into petit-bourgeois reformism was produced out of Marxism's *success*. In turn, this potential regression was understood as pointing beyond itself toward the possibility of a higher form of revolutionary politics.

For the orthodox Marxists, the Dispute was never merely about "defeating" revisionism. Rather, the very existence of a tendency within the socialist workers' movement like Bernstein's, which declared the goal of socialism to be nothing and the movement to be everything, presented an opportunity to deepen the socialist movement's historical (self-)consciousness. Revisionism's emergence demanded not mere condemnation but, more importantly, explanation in the form of a critical appraisal of the Second International's development and the specific problems and tasks presented by that development. Thus, the question that the orthodox Marxists posed was not what was wrong with revisionism, but, to the contrary, what truths about the workers' struggle for socialism were expressed by its emergence within Marxism.

If the Dispute were grasped in this way, the socialist movement might become aware of how its struggle to overcome capitalism was producing within itself tendencies like Bernstein's, which threatened to liquidate the goal of socialism in favor of reforming capitalism. Only once this level of self-clarification and self-consciousness was reached could the problem of revisionism be transcended in practice. The potential to deepen the movement's theoretical understanding of both itself and its object, i.e., capitalism, is precisely the source of the rather bizarre optimism expressed in the orthodox Marxists' polemics against the revisionists. At the exact moment when Marxism appears on the verge of self-destruction, these Marxists are arguing that this development is the precondition for the socialist movement's further advance.[15]

They reasoned that denouncing the revisionists as "traitors" would miss the point. Politics in capitalism expressed, in alienated form, the crisis of bourgeois society under conditions of industrial capital. In its attempts to overcome capital, the proletariat necessarily produced forms of politics that expressed and transformed but did not necessarily overcome bourgeois society's crisis. Marx and Engels attempted to make the socialist movement aware of this. According to them, the workers' demand for socialism in the 19th century was a high symptom of bourgeois society's crisis, not its antithesis. After observing the key political events of their day, they discovered how the proletariat, precisely through its struggle against capital, affected the transformation of capitalism, a fact which, if not recognized, threatened to reify and obscure the rule of capital. Thus, Marx and Engels set themselves the task of clarifying to the workers' movement how its very anti-capitalist self-organization and activity was constantly throwing up new obstacles to socialism — in other words, how the project for socialism was self-contradictory.

While for Marx and Engels, an ideologically heterogeneous and relatively loosely organized socialist movement was taken up as the object of dialectical critique, by the end of the 19th century, Marxism per se had become dialectical and was thus in need of its own critique. In the SPD, for instance, the two protagonists of the Revisionist Dispute both plausibly claimed the Marxist tradition as their own. On the one side were the orthodox Marxists, and on the other, Bernstein, the executor of Marx's literary estate who never conceded to the orthodoxy's charge that he renounced Marxism; thus, it was a dispute firmly within Marxism. France's revisionist camp similarly bore the stamp of Marxism's influence, counting amongst its ranks Millerand and Jean Jaurès, who, although not self-avowed Marxists, acknowledged the profound influence of Marx and Marxism on their politics.

Although both cases certainly involved questions of both theory and practice, it is also true that the fundamental questions Bernstein's book raised were primarily theoretical ones concerning goals, methods, dialectics, etc., while those posed by the Millerand Affair related to the practice of socialist parties, i.e., tactics, coalitions, political judgment, leadership, etc. Lenin, picking up on this, wrote that Millerand "demonstrated" practically what Bernstein had "presented"[16] theoretically.[17] Thus, Marxism's identity crisis was being experienced as a crisis of both means and ends, theory and practice, which allowed for a clarification of both and their relation to one another. The fact that the crisis manifested internationally and took on various forms corresponded to the fact that Marxism's development had been genuinely international and was raising to the level of politics all sorts of working-class social activity. The orthodox Marxists duly grasped Bernstein and Millerand as two forms of the same problem. They felt compelled to explain how Marxism itself had become a potential international obstacle to socialism. The fundamental meaning of their orthodoxy was their belief that Marx's dialectic could be brought to bear on and ultimately resolve its own crisis. This not only required having an account of how revisionism developed within Marxism's bosom but also of how this moment of potential regression was simultaneously a moment of potential advance in the self-consciousness of the socialist movement.

Eduard Bernstein

The landscape of French socialism

In the Third Republic, French socialism was split across ideological, organizational, and strategic lines. One can differentiate six distinct tendencies: anarchism, syndicalism, Blanquism, Marxism, Possibilism, and the Independent Socialists.

(1) Anarchism in France, which found purchase primarily in the trade union movement, traced its roots to Pierre Joseph Proudhon's mid-century writings and was especially influential for many Communards. In the 1880s and 1890s, anarchists in France and across Europe carried out various terrorist attacks, including political assassinations.

(2) Overlapping but not coextensive with anarchism was French syndicalism. Syndicalists were most noteworthy for their rejection of political parties and parliamentarism. Syndicalism was enormously popular in the trade-union movement, particularly in the largest national federation of trade unions, the Confederation General du Travail[18] (CGT).

(3) Blanquism, named after the famous revolutionary Auguste Blanqui, believed that socialism would come about by a small group of well-trained revolutionaries seizing state power in a revolutionary crisis. Blanquism as an independent tendency was liquidated in the course of the Millerand Affair, during which they merged with the Marxists to form the Parti Socialiste de France[19] (PSdF) in 1902.

(4) Marxism, led by the veteran organizer Jules Guesde, argued that the primary task of French socialists was to build a mass revolutionary socialist party modeled after the SPD. Originally a part of the first socialist party in France, the Federation of the Socialist Workers' Party of France, the Marxists leave the Federation, accusing it of renouncing the necessity of revolution, and establish the French Workers' Party.

(5) Possibilism was the perjorative hurled by Guesde at the reformist current in the Federation of the Socialist Workers' Party, led by Paul Brousse. The Possibilists advocated a gradualist path to socialism, believing in the inherently progressive content of reforms, although, initially, they didn't reject the need for revolution.[20] Possibilism split into two after Jean Allemane and his followers left the Federation, believing that Brousse and the Possibilist leadership had degenerated into mere reformists.

(6) The Independent Socialists were a loose group of parliamentarians and intellectuals who preached the necessity of socialist unity and remained independent of any one party or tendency. Included among their ranks were Alexandre Millerand and Jean Jaurès.

What is worth underscoring is just how fractured the post-Commune (1871) socialist movement was. Marxism was by no means the dominant tendency in French socialism throughout the last two decades of the 19th century. While its growth in the workers' movement throughout the 1890s was undeniable, Marxism remained one socialist tendency among many others, all competing for the leadership of the workers' movement and all claiming the legacy of the French revolutionary tradition.

Cutting across these organizational and ideological divisions was the pressing question of the relationship between the parties and the trade-union movement. Revolutionary syndicalists were mostly opposed to subordinating or aligning the trade-union movement to any party, and maintained an unconditional aversion to politics. They had witnessed the massive growth of industrial trade unions since the founding of the Republic, alongside the national organization of the unions into the CGT — developments that ushered in what would come to be known as the "heroic age of french syndicalism" — and concluded that orienting the labor movement toward party politics could only attenuate working-class militancy.

It was feared that aligning the CGT with either of the various socialist tendencies would ideologically divide the working class and thus hinder its ability to carry out unified economic and political strikes against the capitalist class. The general strike — during which a decisive section of the working class would walk off the job, bring the country to a standstill, and then usher in the social revolution — was the dominant revolutionary strategy put forward by French syndicalists, in part because its success didn't depend upon a high degree of ideology or propaganda. The workers were constantly striking on the shop floor independent of ideological commitments, and the general strike spoke to this second nature in ways that parliamentary or party politics couldn't. Many "political socialists," such as the Possibilists and the Independent Socialists, including Jaurès, supported maintaining the segregation between the political parties and the unions. Jules Guesde and the Marxists, however, took the subordination of the German trade unions to the SPD as a model for how the proletariat's trade-union consciousness could be raised to a higher political consciousness through the socialist party and thus advocated for the fusion of the CGT with a future united French socialist party.

The hope expressed in Millerand's 1896 speech to leading French socialists that the socialist movement was on the brink of imminent unification was crushed by the exacerbation of the already existing divisions caused by his entrance into government. French socialism was repartitioned into the Parti Socialiste Français (PSF), led by Jaurès, and the PSdF in 1901–02, led by Guesde. The former, or the Jaurèsistes as they were known, made up of the independent parliamentary socialists and the Right-wing of Possibilism, gave critical support to Millerand's entrance into the cabinet. The PSdF responded by denouncing Millerand's actions and accusing the PSF of collaboration with the bourgeoisie. In addition, the Millerand Affair reaggravated the division between the parties and the trade-union movement. For the revolutionary syndicalists, the whole affair emphatically confirmed their suspicions of parliamentary politics and political parties. Politics merely meant consigning the proletariat to being an appendage of the state. After 1899, they were never so sure of their commitment to the CGT's independence from politicians and their parties.

Jules Guesde

The bourgeois revolution and the Republic

Millerand's cabinet position in a bourgeois republic raised the question of how the socialist movement should relate to the bourgeois revolution. Thus, the Millerand Affair necessarily recalled 1789, 1848, and 1871, corresponding to the Great French Revolution, the Revolution of 1848, and the Paris Commune. Socialists on all sides of the Millerand Affair felt tasked to clarify the relationship of socialism to the bourgeois revolutions and how that relationship concerned the concrete political question of whether socialists should enter coalition governments with bourgeois parties. Accordingly, socialists began writing histories of the first French Revolution. In 1901–04, Jean Jaures published his mammoth four-volume *Histoire Socialiste de la Revolution Française*. In response, Karl Kautsky spent the next few years writing numerous articles about French revolutionary history in the SPD house journal *Die Neue Zeit* before republishing in 1908 his 1889 essay "Die Klassengegensätze im Zeitalter der Französischen Revolution (Class Conflicts in the Era of the French Revolution)." These were followed by various other competing socialist reappraisals of the French Revolution and coincided with the remarkable phenomenon of Leftists calling themselves *republican* or *Jacobin* socialists, recalling an earlier moment of French socialist history and further illustrating the degree to which the memory of the French Revolution mediated the dispute.

Jaurès contra Sorel

Jaurès, dismayed by Millerand's entrance into the government, nevertheless felt obliged to offer critical support for it. His *Socialist History of the French Revolution* (1901), written during the height of the controversy, presented a particular understanding of the relationship between socialism and the French revolutionary-republican tradition that would justify his critical support for Millerand's decision. About the project, Jaurès wrote: "I wrote this long history of the Revolution up till the 9 Thermidor in the midst of the fight; a fight against the enemies of socialism, the Republic, and democracy. A fight as well among the socialists themselves over the best methods of action and combat. And the further I advanced under the crossfire of that battle the stronger was my conviction that for the proletariat democracy is a great conquest."[21]

For Jaurès, then, the Millerand Affair posed point-blank the question of the proletariat's relationship to the French revolutionary tradition, of which the core significance was democracy. He explained how the French Revolution "inadvertently prepared the advent of the proletariat. It realized the two essential conditions for socialism: democracy and capitalism."[22] Jaurès argued that socialism should aspire to realize the progress toward mass democracy made by the Jacobins and, in so doing, would negate that other legacy of the French Revolution: capitalism. Upholding the legacy of the revolutionary bourgeois-republican tradition and thus the possibility for socialism meant defending the vestiges of democracy in the Third Republic from succumbing to the same fate of the First and Second Republics.

Perhaps the highest theoretical expression of revolutionary syndicalism during its "heroic age," Georges Sorel, in *Reflections on Violence* (1908), constructed a scathing and systematic critique of the Jaurèsistes' support for Millerand, which he understood to be an acute expression of Marxism's "decomposition" into statist reformism. For Sorel, the Jacobinism of the Jaurèsistes was an ideological obstacle to the proletariat's ability to independently organize itself for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Jaurès's democratic justifications of the emergency actions taken by the Jacobins during the Terror reflected the pernicious statism in the socialist movement, the preservation of what Sorel called "the old cult of the state," which threatened to relinquish the proletariat's social and political independence and instead make it a dependant of the Bonapartist state.[23] Revealingly, Sorel considered Guesde and the orthodox Marxists to be fellow inductees into the "old cult of the state" alongside the parliamentary socialists because the former, with their commitment to organizing a mass socialist party, were equally guilty of liquidating the proletariat's independence from the capitalist state. He suspected that the true meaning of the Marxist *dictatorship of the proletariat* was a state *dictatorship over the proletariat*. From the Millerand Affair, Sorel concluded that only the complete separation of the syndicalist movement from capitalist political forms, i.e., parliaments and parties, would sustain the proletariat's will to overcome capitalism.

Georges Sorel

Marxism and the Millerand Affair

In a 1905 article written for *Die Neue Zeit*, Kautsky characterized the controversy within the French socialist movement as such:

> Just like in 1848, today we are dealing with not two but three tendencies in the French socialist movement which exhibit some affinity to those of Blanqui, Louis Blanc, and Proudhon. Yet they are no longer as divided as those tendencies were, and have more in common. The spokesmen of all three parties invoke Marx . . . In the interests of French socialism it is urgently necessary to abolish the one-sidedness of both of these tendencies. This can only occur on the basis of Marxism.[24]

Kautsky tried to grasp the antinomy between Jaurès and Sorel, which he characterized as the antinomy between opportunism and anarchism, as a political symptom of the growth of the socialist movement in France. The existence of opposed socialist understandings of bourgeois revolutionary history allowed Kautsky to clarify, through an immanent critique of these accounts, the relationship between socialism and the bourgeois revolution. Such a clarification, Kautsky believed, would provide the necessary theoretical basis on which the pressing practical-political problems raised by Bernstein and Millerand could be addressed, and the accompanying divisions in France healed.

Kautsky detected an undialectical one-sidedness in both Sorel's and Jaurès's opposed accounts of democracy and the bourgeois revolution. For Kautsky, their opposition expressed theoretically the fundamental contradiction embodied in the democratic republic under capitalism. On the one hand, "only the proletariat becomes republican *in principle* due to its position among the classes of modern" and, consequently, "the proletariat can only come to power in the republic." On the other hand, "the bourgeoisie is most directly able to exercise its rule in a parliamentary republic or a parliamentary monarchy, whose head is merely decorative. The parliamentary form of government is the one which corresponds to its class interests." Kautsky continues: "Thus the same republic which forms the basis for the emancipation of the proletariat can at the same time become the basis for the class domination."[25] The proletariat, the only class that is "republican *in principle*," in shedding its blood for the republic thereby created the perfect conditions for its further exploitation. Whereas Jaurès affirmed the democracy and the republic as historic achievements, and whereas Sorel eschewed democracy *tout court*,[26] Marxists like Kautsky tried to grasp the republic and democracy as contradictory political forms of both freedom and unfreedom. The contradictions between Jaurès's and Sorel's perspectives were no mere "error(s) in reasoning" but corresponded to "the contradictions in real society"; they could not be overcome by affirming one side, but only once their historical conditions of possibility had been raised to self-consciousness.[27] For Kautsky, this meant returning to 1848. On Marx's understanding of that crucial year in socialist history, Kautsky wrote:

> But, as Marx noted immediately after the revolution's conclusion, the only thing the men of 1848 had borrowed from the Jacobins of 1793 was their costumes. While the men of the revolution still believed that the tasks they had to carry out were the same as those of 1793, while they believed that the same forces were at their command and the same methods were called for, the battlefield, weapons, and even the fighters themselves had thoroughly changed. As encouraging as the revolutionary tradition was, it became an obstacle for the new revolution because it hampered the recognition of the real tasks at hand, as well as the means of solving them.[28]

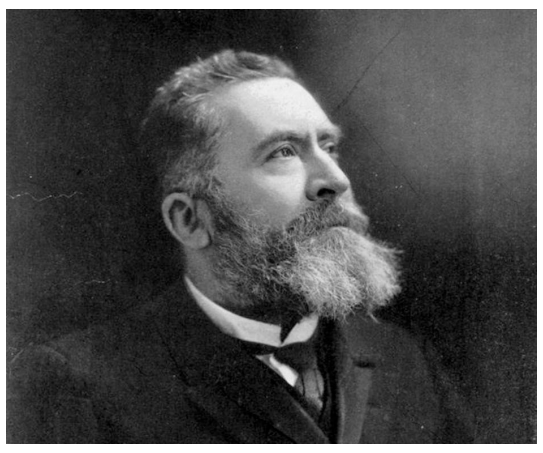
As early as 1848, the "republican superstition" proved an ideological obstacle preventing the workers from recognizing their historically unique task of overcoming capital through independent political struggle. However, some 50 years later, the "republican superstition" was once again, in Kautsky's words, "duping the workers."[29] As evidenced by his support for socialists entering into governing coalitions, Jaurès's understanding of democracy neglected the key political questions of who would lead the democratic movement and how. He thus fell below the level of Marx and Engels's insights into the 1848 Revolution in France, which clarified the proletariat's task of leading the bourgeois-democratic revolution as an independent political force. And it was precisely based on these insights that the Second International was founded. The class-neutral republicanism of Jaurès, therefore, threatened to liquidate the historical consciousness gleaned from 1848 and, by extension, undermine the theoretical foundations of the Second International.

Kautsky likewise characterized the turn to anti-political syndicalism as a regression below 1848 levels of historical consciousness. Kautsky wrote that "even if the anti-parliamentarism of the general strike-ists is understandable, it is nonetheless completely wrong . . . As obvious as its dangers are, parliamentarism is necessary."[30] Sorel's wholehearted rejection of politics meant abandoning the sphere that "schooled" the workers in the shortcomings of bourgeois parliamentarism and republicanism. It was only through political struggle in various forms that the workers would clarify the necessity of socialism. Moreover, political struggle might entail the creation of opportunism in the party, but this was nonetheless necessary. Sorel's anarchism was, on this account, self-defeating. While Marxists sympathized with Sorel's liberal aversion to mass politics, the school of history had taught the proletariat that the socialist party and the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the use of state and political power, were nonetheless necessary.

The re-emergence of republican socialism and its opposite, syndicalist anarchism (Sorel), Kautsky grasped as the repetition of 1848, during which republican socialists like Louis Blanc and anarchists like Proudhon had given insufficient leadership to the nascent Parisian proletariat. If it remained unconscious, the repetition threatened to liquidate the historical experience that the socialist workers' movement had accumulated since 1848. Party debates and theoretical work, however, allowed the proletariat to become conscious of the historical repetition and thereby gain a greater clarity of its task: to make a revolution that wouldn't merely repeat the crisis of the bourgeois revolution, but get beyond it.

In accordance with Lenin's observation that because the problem of opportunism had become international, it demanded a global response, the seemingly national dispute within French socialism was thus put front and center *à l'ordre du jour*[31] for the international proletariat at the 1900 and 1904 Paris and Amsterdam Congresses of the International, at which the questions raised by the Millerand Affair were intensely debated. At the Congresses, the so-called Kaustky resolution of 1900 and the Dresden-Amsterdam resolution of 1904 condemned Millerand's actions. They affirmed the necessity of proletarian political independence and a revolutionary transformation of bourgeois society, not its reform. Both passed with narrow majorities, yet the message was clear: the socialist proletariat was to have no interest in administering capitalism. It was an important victory for the Marxists in France, which came on the back of the triumph of the orthodox faction within the SPD at its 1903 Party Congress in Dresden. Jaurès, at first reluctant to yield authority to the International over questions of national tactics, eventually accepted the International's decision, thus setting the groundwork for the unification of his PSF with the PSdF in the Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière[32] (SFIO).

Of course, this is not to say that the crisis of Marxism was ever resolved — it was not — not in France, nor Germany, and definitely not internationally. The Second International's commitment to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, as ratified in the 1900 and 1904 resolutions, certainly didn't translate to reality, as the events of 1914–19 can attest. In France, the divisions created by the Millerand Affair between the



Portrait of Jean Jaurès (1911)

political socialists and the trade-union movement were never fully healed. The separation of the two remained a subject of continuous controversy within the SFIO, with the revisionist wing upholding the political independence of the unions and the Marxists advocating for their subordination to the party.[33]

Conclusion

Returning to the present day, it is obvious that the present "crises" in capitalist politics don't present a possibility for the Left like the crisis in socialist politics during the Revisionist Dispute did. In the absence of a class-conscious international labor movement, and under conditions of severe theoretical regression, today's Left is resigned to being a hyperexcitable yet fundamentally impotent spectator to the transformations of capitalist politics. Nevertheless, the Left remains insistent on indulging in the history and language of Marxism to accompany its spectacular enchantment to capitalist politics. It is, therefore, appropriate that throughout the crisis of neoliberalism, the Left has oscillated between the 1930s and 1960s as historical touchstones — the Popular Front and the New Left, for instance, have each had their moment in the sun with the Millennials and now with the Zoomers. During both periods, the Left, however obliquely, recalled the memory of an earlier period when socialist political movements were organized independently of capitalist parties and the state but ultimately failed to reconstitute such a political reality.

In his 2018 article for the *Platypus Review*, Mitchell Abidor, reflecting on the experiences of 1968 in France, asked if the intergenerational conflict that arose in the 60s between the Old Left and the New Left could ever be overcome, whether future iterations of the Left were resigned to endlessly repeating these two moments.[34] Abidor identified the question of the revolutionary subject of history as the primary cause of the division between the Old and New Lefts. The former upheld the Stalinized and bureaucratized communist parties and labor unions as the legitimate political organs of the working class, while the latter looked for a revolutionary subject outside the working classes of the advanced capitalist world. It seems that the Millennial Left answered Abidor's question with a resounding *No* — that the Left's "intergenerational division" will not be overcome. Indeed, we cannot claim that the question of who the revolutionary subject of history is was answered any more convincingly by the Millennial Left than by the New Left.[35] In his attempts to reconsider the history of the Left in France, Abidor can only reach back to the two familiar historical touchstones, the 30 and the 60s. In so doing, in conjunction with the present Leftist discourse around the NFP, he represses the memory of the Second International, which actually was able to constitute a revolutionary subject.

In effect, this historical amnesia concerning the Marxism of the Second International betrays a profound pessimism in the Left's ability to transform present reality. The Second International fundamentally transformed social and political reality by organizing an international workers' movement to carry out international socialist revolution. When this goal seemed threatened, the Left critically and ruthlessly confronted the meaning of its efforts to transform society. With an optimism perhaps incomprehensible today, orthodox Marxists believed that the moment of Marxism's potential regression pointed beyond itself to new possibilities for revolutionary politics. In contrast, the degraded objective and subjective historical conditions of the 1930s provided little opportunity for such politics. Unlike the Revisionist Dispute, which was the product of the success of Marxism, the debates over the Popular Front were fundamentally conditioned by Marxism's degeneration after the defeat of the revolutionary wave of 1917–19. Consequently, the deceptively similar questions raised by the Popular Front were necessarily addressed in degraded terms, which, far from advancing revolutionary possibilities, instead "served to sacrifice the possibility of a socialist revolution."[36] Yet, even if it takes the form of counter-identifying with it, the Left remains intent on inheriting that legacy, thus betraying an unforced conservative resignation to its own irrelevance in the present.[37] **|P**

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[1] Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/live/VdjoxGrHMpE>.

[2] V. I. Lenin, "Marxism and Revisionism" (1908), in *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 15 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 29–39, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/apr/03.htm>.

[3] National Rally, founded in 1972.

[4] New Popular Front, launched in 2024.

[5] Nouvelle Union populaire écologique et sociale (New Ecological and Social People's Union).

[6] The Republicans (France), founded in 2015 by Nicolas Sarkozy.

[7] France Unbowed, launched in 2016.

[8] "'Election has been stolen': Far left and right react to Barnier as PM," *France 24*, September 5, 2024, <https://f24.my/AZpM>.

[9] Parti socialiste, founded in 1969.

[10] "Olivier Faure affirme qu'aucun membre du PS ne participera au gouvernement Barnier," *Entrevue* (September 6, 2024), <https://entrevue.fr/olivier-faure-affirme-quaucun-membre-du-ps-ne-participera-au-gouvernement-barnier/>.

[11] Chris Maisano, "The Passions and the Interests," *Jacobin* (July 19, 2024), <https://jacobin.com/2024/07/left-strategy-antifascism-npf-popular-front>.

[12] In the 1898 legislative elections, for instance, the socialists won more than 800,000 votes, a significant increase from the 1893 elections.

[13] It is worth remembering that Eduard Bernstein was just as surprised over the controversy that his book *Evolutionary Socialism* (1899) provoked. The theory Bernstein laid out was meant to be nothing more than an update of Marxism in accordance with changed historical conditions.

[14] Rosa Luxemburg, *Social Reform or Revolution* (1900/1908), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/index.htm>.

[15] See the final chapter of Luxemburg's *Social Reform or Revolution* and the first footnote of chapter 1 of Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* (1902).

[16] Lenin, *What is to be Done?*

[17] The reason for this difference is relatively obvious. In Germany, the Bismarckian constitution precluded the possibility of a socialist minister. The German parliament, the Reichstag, was mostly subordinate to the Imperial Chancellor, who could run the government with the bare minimum support in parliament. For all its growth and organization, the SPD couldn't obtain any proportional degree of parliamentary power. Thus, they used this situation to their advantage by using parliament as a national soap box to consistently denounce bourgeois government while capturing a mass audience. In France, however, the Third Republic offered ample opportunities for socialists to wield parliamentary power. The prime minister could not run his government or pass legislation without the support of parliament, and, therefore, socialist parliamentarians necessarily played a role in the constitution of governmental power. Therefore, the Revisionist Dispute reared its head in a different form in France than in Germany. In France, the defense of the Republic was a concrete practical question that had concrete practical consequences for the socialists in parliament. So were the questions of entering a bourgeois government or forming coalitions with bourgeois parties. The controversy took on a more or less theoretical character in Germany, where wielding political power in the capitalist state was impossible.

[18] General Confederation of Labour, founded in 1895.

[19] Socialist Party of France, formed in the 1902 merger of the (Marxist) Parti Ouvrier Français (French Workers' Party) and the (Blanquist) Parti socialiste révolutionnaire (Socialist Revolutionary Party).

[20] "Possibilist" was initially a pejorative that Guesde hurled at Paul Brousse and his followers for what he considered to be their reformism, which the latter later appropriated.

[21] Jean Jaurès, "How Should we Judge the Revolutionaries," in *Socialist History of the Revolution* (1901), trans. Mitchell Abidor, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/jaures/index.htm>.

[22] Jaurès, "Introduction," in *Socialist History of the French Revolution*.

[23] Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 103.

[24] Karl Kautsky, "The Republic and Social Democracy in France," in *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, ed. and trans. Ben Lewis (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020), 268.

[25] Ibid., 159.

[26] [French] Simply, just, without qualification, etc.

[27] Kautsky, "The Republic," 159.

[28] Ibid., 173.

[29] Ibid., 160.

[30] Ibid., 266–67.

[31] [French] On the agenda; literally, on the order of the day.

[32] French Section of the Workers' International.

[33] Still incensed by the considerable support Millerand received from within the socialist camp and buoyed by the considerable growth of the syndicalist movement, the CGT reaffirmed its independence from the SFIO in the 1906 Amiens Resolution and would maintain its independence until it became a "mass organization" of the Parti communiste français (French Communist Party) (PCF) in the 1930s.

[34] Mitchell Abidor, "May '68 in France and the hidden war within the Left," *Platypus Review* 109 (September 2018), <https://platypus1917.org/2018/09/04/may-68-in-france-and-the-hidden-war-within-the-left/>.

[35] Bernie Sanders, for example, with his progressive New Dealism and his history as a streetfighting student activist, seemed to be the incarnation of both moments and in whom all parts of the Millennial Left could see something they liked.

[36] Ligue Trotskyiste de France, "Le Front populaire de Juin 36: Comment le PCF a saboté la Possibilité d'une révolution ouvrière," *Le Bolchevik* 179 (March 2007), <https://old.iclfi.org/francais/lebol/179/frontpopulaire.html>.

[37] And yet, we mustn't forget that there were moments during the Millennial Left when it felt itself tasked by the Marxism of the Second International. This raises the problem of the repression of the Millennial Left's own history and its own once-utopian horizons.

neo-Nazis was now presented as a top priority. Hundreds of thousands of people found themselves at demonstrations and vigils, united against neo-Nazis. As it became clear shortly thereafter, that the Düsseldorf attack was perpetrated not by German neo-Nazis but by Arabic antisemites, nobody seemed to mind. The trivialization of antisemitism coming from Arabic, Islamic, or generally migrant backgrounds, as opposed to neo-Nazis, was built into state and civil-social activism from the beginning on. The federal government initiated an action program worth millions to sponsor civil-social initiatives against Right-wing extremism. The "Civitas" program[26] alone made more than €50 million available by 2006. Countless Antifa activists, either with or without a degree in education, could now pursue their activity in these organizations, with the added twist that what was previously free activity was now paid with state funds.

This meant that antifascism was suddenly no longer the "fight for the whole," as one of the largest antifascist groups in the country had described it in a brochure just two years earlier: against state and capital, Germany, the "pigs," or the "system," as you like it.[27] Instead, it seemed to have become state-supporting. An Antideutsch circle from Halle soon wrote, "Antifascism is the entry application to enter decent German society."[28]

Whoever didn't go over to the Antifa out of some opposition to small Nazi cliques in the middle of nowhere but because of a desire to confront society, to confront the unclarified but hypothesized connection between relatives, teachers, parents, politics, and the economy — in short, to confront the horror of the everyday; whoever was not ready, in contrast to many others at the time, to seal himself off from reality, had to find a new field of play after the summer of 2000. It was against this background that the strategies of the antifascist movement spoke, and I quote, of "new political fields," which would have to be tilled by Antifa. At a large Antifa congress in Göttingen in April 2001, in which around 700 people took part, not only was the liquidation of the Antifascist Action / Nationwide Organization (AA/BO) announced, but all this under the motto, "The year we make contact."

The subject of desire

The subject of contact was soon determined. It was the anti-globalization movement, which had been in the headlines since the late 90s because of its mass militancy. The protests against the 1999 economic summit in Cologne were barely noticed by the Antifascist groups at the time. By 2001, they were joining the large demonstrations in force. There were about a dozen charter buses to these demos leaving just from Berlin, ready for Antifascists-become-critics of globalization. They said they wanted to critically intervene in the movement; a large Antifascist magazine spoke euphorically of a "Summer of Resistance."[29]

The summer was nevertheless followed by fall. It even began in June. The 2001 EU Summit in Göteborg saw almost civil war-like conditions; law enforcement fired live munitions at demonstrators. Some were wounded, one of them in critical condition. A few weeks after, at the G8 Meeting in Genoa, police shot 23-year old No Global activist Carlo Guiliani. The mass militancy against globalization had reached its limits. The movement was confronted by a massive wave of repression at the same time. A few people from my hometown got off easy: they were banned for about a decade from traveling to the Czech Republic after a particularly colorful protest against the IMF and the World Bank in Prague. A member of a large Berlin Antifa group who has joined the editorship of *Jungle World* in the meantime was not so lucky: he sat behind bars for two years in Sweden after he was caught up in riots against globalization in Göteborg.

At the same time, Antifa's flirtation with the anti-globalization movement was challenged by 9/11. The attacks happened only seven weeks after the summit meeting in Genoa. A political group from Halle made it known nationally how difficult the critical intervention in the anti-globalization movement was shaping up to be in this context: shaken up by the suicide bombings in Israel, the attacks on the World Trade Center, and the Islamist rallying cries against "crusaders and Jews," they held up a banner at the 2002 anti-EU summit in Copenhagen opposing antisemitism and anti-Zionism. This led to them being smeared by the anti-globalization protesters as Nazis, ending in physical confrontation and being shut off from the protest.[30] Even the critique of antisemitism counted as pro-Israel.

Whoever wanted neither to dismiss these failures as peripheral events nor at the same time to renounce political praxis as such was forced more or less automatically to the side of the ideology-critique circles who had left their ivory towers after 9/11. These, in turn, were strengthened by the experts of the Antifa movement who had become disoriented by the "Revolt of the Decent" and the crisis of the critique of globalization.

Even if a few luminaries of the movement had consistently spoken out against identity politics and superficial confessions, attending a peace demonstration with Israeli flags came to substitute for the jolt of learning through doing which the traditional Antifa demonstrations could no longer offer, as these had long since been welcomed and endorsed by the president, mayors, and social studies teachers. Even the need for unifying symbolism, which brought not a few people to Antifa, outlived its usefulness: besides Israeli and American flags — obviously correct — there soon came IDF trousers, ideological pins, vacations in Israel, Hebrew courses, Near East studies, and *Jewish History and Culture*.

The crisis of the Antideutsch

The high point of the alliance between ideology critique and the newly directionless Antifa was nonetheless quickly receding in the rearview mirror. Out of about 30 groups who mobilized in Hamburg in 2004 for one of the largest Antideutsch demonstrations of the 00s, more than half didn't exist by the end of the decade. (Now only three remain.) Around the same time, a desire was expressed in *Bahamas* to renounce the term "Antideutsch." One should be ideology-critical "and nothing else."[31] Even if they were never successful at freeing themselves from the term, this marked an early reaction to the looming crisis of the Antideutsch. Not only had the formula "Antideutsch" become, in many ways, a stand-in for an identity, but the already wide spectrum it designated became even more diffuse.

There were at least three reasons for the crisis. The end of the Iraq War in 2003 and of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2005 meant that (1) the immediate reasons for taking to the streets had disappeared. The war in Lebanon in 2006 offered one last short opportunity to mobilize. Following this, the activist part of the movement fell into a well-known ditch of campaigning, that phase after "over-politicization" (Oskar Negt) which brings frustration and lament. Some comrades retreated into private life as a response; others discovered new spheres of action for themselves. In the course of their innumerable changes of direction, they realized that it wasn't just because of "the cause" that they took part in actions, but because of the action itself — at some point "the cause" fell by the wayside. Football and its fanatical, so-called "Ultra" fandom became attractive around this time; others got into martial arts. The Berlin Antifa anti-globalization activist who was sentenced to two years' jail time in 2001 after his arrest in the Göteburg riots became East German champion in mixed martial arts and has fought professionally ever since.

The drying up of successful mobilization efforts meant furthermore that (2) the intellectual-historical contradictions of the movement became evident: freedom, equality, and security; social-contract theory and utopianism; materialism and idealism are hard to reconcile. Since enduring this tension requires intellectual effort, the easier way out became more attractive. Some activists became Western liberals, others conservative Atlanticists. Many found their way back to Leftist traditionalism.

Above all, (3) numerous ideas of the movement became generalized, even if in a botched way, which is to say, without the unifying idea of defending the principle of the West, measuring it by its own standard, and going beyond it on this basis.[32] The critique of anti-zionism shed light especially on the youth organizations of the Linkspartei,[33] the SPD, and the Greens. After the Second Lebanon War, an Israel solidarity working group, the BAK[34] Schalom was founded within the Linkspartei; shortly thereafter, three of the most prominent politicians of the Linkspartei at that time, Gregor Gysi, Katja Kipping, and Petra Pau, were speaking out against the traditional hostility to Israel in their own organization.[35] Franziska Drohsel, the chairwoman of the Jusos[36] between 2007 and 2010, publicly criticized Left anti-Zionism; there took place similar debates in the youth organization of the Greens.

Furthermore, the condemnation of social protests as nationalistic, which have since become common practice in the Left-liberal public sphere, had already been tried out by a portion of the Antideutsch in the 90s. This was framed as a critique of a general tendency on the Left to idealize the lower classes. Nationalist riots were regularly refashioned as protests around social grievances in the years after German reunification. At the very latest, this pattern has been reversed since the adoption of the so called Agenda 2010, the dissolution of the welfare state in the Federal Republic of Germany: racism and nationalism are now rarely glossed over in public — on the contrary. Making reference to the nationalist undertones which social protests sometimes carry often serves merely to denounce any criticism of the dismantling of the welfare state.

Cover of Bahamas *94 (Spring 2024)*

Old and new middle class

The Antideutsch were obviously not responsible for this development. Even if a part of their positions reached the Left-of-Center parties, as well as both conservative and liberal media, they had no power to change society. Without wanting such a thing, they instead became the eccentric offshoots — the *lunatic fringe*, in Theodore Roosevelt's words[37] — of a longer-term process which aimed at modernizing Germany. This process was directly related to the replacement of the old middle class with a new one, and the concomitant creation of a new service proletariat.

As the sociologist Andreas Reckwitz once expressed, the old middle class is rather down-to-earth, tied to crafts and industrial labor, with relatively constrained mobility.[38] It's geared towards "maintaining its status [*Statusinteresse*] and self-discipline": "it's about a concrete standard of living, rather than the immaterial quality of life which is so important to the new middle class."[39] It's different from the new middle class whose formation was closely bound with the formation of that "*capitalisme post-moderne*" which has been discussed in France for the last 30 years; more academic, hedonistic, mobile, and cosmopolitan. "The cosmopolitans," according to Reckwitz, "are for openness in many regards: of identity, of markets, against too strong rules or regulations. Liberalization in the widest sense of the word, in fact."[40]

Most activists of the movement came from this new middle class; others aimed to join it. The Antideutsch paeans to individualism, cosmopolitanism, pleasure, and consciousness of historical responsibility also expressed, unbeknownst to them, the social and cultural rationale of their original or intended milieus: "Bourgeois and Bohème at once," as Reckwitz puts it — as if he had read the Antideutsch leaflets of the 00s.[41] The same is true of the Antideutsch critiques of collectivism, their attacks on provincialism, and occasional arrogance towards the abandoned members of the new lower class, who were actually the cultural antithesis to this new middle class.

In other words, it's likely that the Antideutsch slogans and ideas were temporarily picked up by a disoriented Antifa public in such an enthusiastic manner because they offered two possibilities at once: one could orient oneself unconsciously to the socio-economic Zeitgeist while at the same time preparing oneself to fight against it. This also corresponded in a distorted way to the imperatives of work and life that came with the rise of the new middle class — the "key demographic of this late-modern society," according to Reckwitz: it was about an alliance between forced participation and permanent distinction, between striving for uniqueness and uniformity.

As the modernizing process which was tied to the replacement of the old middle class with a new one could barely be ignored, a portion of those who stayed in the Antideutsch milieu timidly began to realize what they had come to support. In this context, the disputes which took place around Corona and the war in Ukraine were not the causes of the decline of the Antideutsch. These make up rather the sad coda that accelerated the disintegration of the remaining milieu. If one believes Marx, the official reasons for a movement and the actual functions of a movement often diverge significantly.[42]

Conditions of possibility

The conditions in which things developed and were perpetuated obviously do not falsify the Antideutsch critique of false collectivism, nor solidarity with Israel, nor the synthesis of utopia and contractual thinking, or of materialism and idealism: perhaps the genesis and the validity of an idea are not so easily distinguishable from each other as is often portrayed in Intro-to-philosophy courses; at the same time they cannot be collapsed into one. Especially given the present threat to Israel and ongoing anti-zionist rollbacks, a collective critical voice which would defend the West in Max Horkheimer's sense, even against itself, is urgently needed.

Most of the preconditions of Antideutsch activism have nonetheless disappeared. Antifa is no longer in a crisis, but rather long since integrated into the ideological state apparatus. A quarter century's worth of state-funded Antifascist projects betrays the rebellious gesture which one occasionally adopts as hardly a challenge to the content of the state. Wherever the tentative recognition of one's own conformism could begin to materialize despite it all, collective defense mechanisms [*kollektive Abwehrmuster*] are deployed, measures which could be well rehearsed in the almost 25 years since the proclamation of the "Revolt of the Decent."

But above all, the modernizing process which the Antideutsch accompanied is already far advanced. The old middle class which dominated the Bundesrepublik in the Schmidt and Kohl eras[43] has lost its former meaning; the rise of a new middle strata is long since complete. This signifies the disappearance of not only the movement's sociological conditions, but also the basic socio-economic conditions for the rise of the Antideutsch. Each movement has its time — even if it never wanted to be a movement. **|P**

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[1] Jan-Georg Gerber, "Die Antideutschen: Ein Nachruf," *Bahamas* 94 (Spring 2024), <https://redaktion-bahamas.org/hefte/94/-zusammenland-Eine-Islamisierung-findet-nicht-statt.html>.

[2] Jan Gerber, "Nachwort zur Neuauflage," in *Das letzte Gefecht: Die Linke im Kalten Krieg* [*The Last Fight: The Left in the Cold War*], republished in an expanded edition (Berlin: XS Verlag, 2022), 205–14.

[3] See, for instance, *Bahamas* editorial staff, "Hinter dem Ruf nach Frieden verschanzen sich die Mörder: Stellungnahme der BAHAMAS-Redaktion zum islamistischen Massaker in den USA" ["The Murderers Hide Behind the Call for Peace: Statement of *Bahamas* on the islamistic massacre in the USA"] (September 14, 2001), *CEE IEH 81* (October 2001), <https://conne-island.de/nf/81/20.html>.

[4] Thunder in Paradise, "Perfidie des Allzumenschlichen. Äquidistanz heißt Kollaboration mit dem Judenhass" ["Perfidy of the All-too-human: Equidistance means Collaboration with Jew Hatred"], *Thunder in Paradise* (October 29, 2023), <https://thunderinparadise.org/2023/10/29/perfidie-des-allzumenschlichen/>.

[5] Founded by editors who left the daily newspaper *Junge Welt*.

[6] Wolfgang Pohrt, *Theorie des Gebrauchswerts. Über die Vergänglichkeit der historischen Voraussetzungen, unter denen allein das Kapital Gebrauchswert setzt* (Berlin: Edition Tiamat, 1995).

[7] Notstandsgesetze.

[8] See Walter Benjamin, "Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History'" (1940), in *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938–1940*, eds. Howard Eiland, et al., trans. Edmund Jephcott, et al. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2006), 402.

[9] [Ancient Greek] The right time, the proper time, the exact time, the critical time, etc.

[10] IDF East. *Zahal* is the Hebrew acronym for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). *Ost* is German for East.

[11] [French] Afloat; literally, on the water. These words are used as a title by Guy de Maupassant for a short story (1876) as well as a travel book (1888), and by Theodor Adorno for an aphorism in *Minima Moralia* (1951).

[12] [French] Liberty forever.

[13] A tank manufactured by the USSR in WWII.

[14] After the Morgenthau Plan, which was a proposal made by U.S. Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. in 1944, the goal of which was to weaken Germany, following WWII, by removing its arms industry and other key industries.

[15] [French] Potato Association, an allusion to the German preference for potato dishes.

[16] See Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

[17] Jürgen Elsässer, "Weshalb die Linke anti-deutsch sein muss" ["Why the Left must be Antideutsch"], *analyse & kritik – Zeitung für linke Debatte und Praxis* 315 (1990).

[18] See Jan Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland? Die Linke im Zusammenbruch des "realen Sozialismus"* [*Germany never again? The Left in the collapse of "real socialism"*] (Freiburg: ça ira, 2010).

[19] Quoted in the editorial in *Bahamas* 18 (Winter 1995), <https://redaktion-bahamas.org/hefte/18/Der-Fall-Deutschland.html>.

[20] "Lasst alle Hoffnungen fahren" ["Abandon all Hope"], *17 Grad Celsius* 1 (1991).

[21] Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland*.

[22] Also known as the Second Intifada (2000–05).

[23] Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands.

[24] Max Horkheimer, new foreword to *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie. Vier Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1968), 10.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Initiative founded in 2001 against Right-wing extremism in the former East Germany, since expanded to German-speaking Europe and modified to deal with issues of urban mobility.

[27] Antifaschistische Aktion Berlin, *Das Konzept Antifa. Grundsatztexte und Konkretes* [*The Concept of Antifa: Principles and Details*] (Berlin: Eigenverlag, 1998).

[28] Arbeitsgruppe No Tears for Krauts, "Ladenschluss versus Ausverkauf" ["Closing time vs. clearance sale"], (October 3, 2007), leaflet for the Leipzig anti-unity demonstration, <http://nokrauts.org/texte/2007-10-03_Ladenschluss.pdf>.

[29] Phase 2, "Summer of Resistance," *Phase 2* 2 (Fall 2001), <https://www.phase-zwei.org/hefte/artikel/summer-of-resistance-1693>.

[30] See Gipfelstürmer Halle, "Antisemitische Ausfälle in Kopenhagen" (2002), in *Gegen die deutsche Normalität. Interventionen hallescher Antifa-Gruppen (2000–2014)*, ed. Arbeitsgruppe Antifa (Halle: 2014), 67ff.

[31] Justus Wertmüller, "Ideologiekritisch und sonst nichts: Drei notwendige Vorankündigungen zur Konferenz" ["Ideology-critical and nothing else: Three necessary advance notices for the conference"], *Bahamas* 57 (2009), <https://redaktion-bahamas.org/hefte/57/Ideologiekritisch-und-sonst-nichts.html>.

[32] In a certain way, this process resembles the development once laid out by Oskar Negt for the Sozialistische Büro (Socialist Bureau), one of the overflow tanks for the "undogmatic" part of the collapsing protest movement of 1968. As he wrote, the organization found itself since the late 70s in a decline which could only be inadequately described as failure: "The foundational ideas of this project have become in many respects so generalized that one barely finds people on the Left anymore who don't speak about basic interests, experience, and needs." Oskar Negt, "Politik als Produktionsprozess" ["Politics as a production process"], in *Tradition heißt nicht, Asche aufzuheben, sondern die Flamme am Brennen erhalten*, ed. Komitee für Grundrechte und Demokratie (Sensbachtal: Komitee für Grundrechte und Demokratie, 1985), 53.

[33] The Left Party.

[34] A BAK, or *Bundesarbeitskreis* [Federal Working Group] is a group or committee organized at the federal level for political / governmental or professional / academic ends. BAK Schalom describes itself as "a platform against anti-semitism, anti-Zionism, anti-Americanism, regressive anticapitalism, and Islam-apologetics."

[35] Philipp Gessler and Veit Medick, "Israel spaltet die Linke," *Taz* (May 13, 2008), <https://taz.de/Streit-ueber-Antizionismus/!5182229/>; Gregor Gysi, "Die Haltung der deutschen Linken zum Staat Israel," presented at a conference on "60 Years of Israel" (2008), hosted by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, <https://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2008/04/gysi.htm>; Katja Kipping, "Jenseits der Konfrontationslogik," *Taz* (December 12, 2006), <https://taz.de/!342145/>.

[36] Junge Sozialisten/innen, youth organization of the SPD.

[37] Theodore Roosevelt, "An Art Exhibition," in *History as Literature and Other Essays* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 305.

[38] See Andreas Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities*, trans. Valentine A. Pakis (London: Polity, 2020).

[39] Andreas Reckwitz, "Der Unterschied liegt in der Kultur" ["The difference lies in the culture"], *Taz* (August 2, 2018), <https://taz.de/Soziologe-ueber-die-neue-Mittelklasse/!5523416/>.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852).

[43] Helmut Schmidt, Chancellor of West Germany (1974–82). Helmut Kohl, chancellor of West Germany (1982–90) and chancellor of Germany (1990–98).